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## LIFE'S DESTINATION IN THE EYES OF A POET<sup>1</sup>

*kāṇāḥ kamalapatrākṣāḥ kadaryāḥ kalpaśākhinaḥ |  
kātarā vikramādityāḥ kavidṛggocaram gatāḥ ||* SRŚ 21

Within the power of poet's eye, the one-eyed men become lotus-petalled-eyed,  
avaricious people become wish-fulfilling divine trees<sup>2</sup>, cowards become the suns of valour<sup>3</sup>.

The above stanza taken from the Sabhārañjanaśataka, *The Century for the Assembly's Entertainment*<sup>4</sup>, was composed by Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, the 17<sup>th</sup>-century poet, minister of Tirumalai Nāyaka who was the king of Madurai. Dīkṣita is especially well-known for his close observations of human nature and application of wit, humour and sarcasm in the service of poetry. He wrote several works, spanning almost the

<sup>1</sup> The author of this paper is supported by the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP).

<sup>2</sup> *Kalpaśākhin* also known as *kalpavṛkṣa*, *kalpataru*, *kalpadruma* or *kalpapādapa* is one of the five trees of *svarga* or Indra's paradise fabled to fulfil desires.

<sup>3</sup> *Vikramāditya*, "the sun of valour" is the name of a celebrated Indian emperor, often characterised as an ideal king. The word became synonym of a hero.

<sup>4</sup> Partially satirical and partially didactic, 105-stanzas long Sabhārañjanaśataka describes the ideal assembly of scholars and raises the subjects of knowledge, morality, virtue, kingship, etc. For more details see Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, *Œuvres Poétiques de Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita I: Texte, traduction et notes*, Pondichéry: Institut Français d'Indologie, 1967. Nīlakaṇṭha's humour and opinion about the scholars comes to the fore also in the Kalivḍambana, *Mockery of the Kali Era*. In contradiction with the stanza from the Sabhārañjanaśataka, at the very beginning of the work the author wrote:

'If you want to triumph in a meeting, do not be afraid, do not pay attention, do not listen to the opponent's arguments,—just immediately contradict them! (...) If the arbitrator is not learned, one wins by shouting. If he is learned one has only to insinuate bias: "Greed" is the premise, "money" is the probandum, "the priest" is the example, "personal advance" is the result: such is the correct syllogistic procedure.' (trans. Somadeva Vasudeva: Somadeva Vasudeva (ed. and trans.), *Three Satires by Bhallata, Kshemendra & Nīlakantha*, Clay Sanskrit Library, New York: New York University Press & JJC Foundation, 2005, p. 321.)

entire gamut of Sanskrit literary forms. Although his compositions can be classified in various genres, the majority of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's writings seem to bear a distinctive sense of melancholy and feeling of pensive sadness. The Śāntivilāsa, *The Manifestation of Tranquillity*, belongs to the group of so-called *ṣaḍgranthi*, the sextet of *laghūkāvyas*.<sup>5</sup> The poem consists of fifty-one stanzas dealing with *nirveda*, meaning 'indifference' or 'disregard of worldly objects'. The work is short and usually referred to as describing the happiness that results from contemplation and conquering one's desires. The Śāntivilāsa has also been published a few times and translated into English and French.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of the present paper is to examine the work's form and pay close attention to subtle links and compositional patterns hidden in the text.

Sanskrit poets scarcely provide readers with personal details about themselves. The paradigm of collectivism prevails in India, and for a long time, especially in the field of Sanskrit *kāvya* literature, there was very little to no space for the emergence of

<sup>5</sup> The other Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's works classified within *ṣaḍgranthi* are the already mentioned Kalividambana and the Sabhārañjanaśataka, the Ānandasāgarastava, the Anyāpadeśaśataka, and the Vairāgyaśataka (N. Parmeswaran Unni, Nilakantha Diksita, New Delhi: Sahitya Academi, 1995, p. 20.). The last of these works is ascribed both to Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita and Appaya Dīkṣita. Nevertheless, the lucid and plain style of Vairāgyaśataka, as well as the topic of renunciation prevailing in many of Nīlakaṇṭha's writings seem to speak in favour of the younger family member.

<sup>6</sup> Śāntivilāsa's edition has been published in 1890 in the Kavyamālā series (2<sup>nd</sup> edition: Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, *Śāntivilāsa*, Kavyamālā 6, Mumbai: Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1930, pp. 12-20), in 1907 by Sarasvatibhandagara Press with Tamil paraphrase (Nilakantha Diksita, *Santi-vilasa*, ed. Ramanatha, Madras: Sarasvatibhandagara Press, 1907), in 1911 by Vani Vilasa Press (Nilakantha Diksita, *The Minor Poems of Nilakantha Dikshita*, Srirangam: Vani Vilasa Press, 1911, pp. 57-69), in 1942 in the 35<sup>th</sup> volume of Balamanorama Series (Nilakantha Diksita, The minor poems. Laghukavyani, ed. C. Sankara Rama Sastri, Balamanorama Series 35, Mylapore, Madras: Sri Balamanorama Press, 1942), in Sri Kamakoti Granthavali Series, in 1943, with Tamil translation (Nilakantha Diksita, *Sri Shanti Vilasa*, trans. Y. Mahalinga Sastri, Sri Kamakoti Granthavali Series 9, Kumbakonam: Sri Kamakoti Publishing House, 1943). In 1967 has been published the French translation of the Śāntivilāsa (Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, *Œuvres Poétiques de Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita I: Texte, traduction et notes*). The complete English translation has been published in the Clay Sanskrit Library Series in 2009 (Bronner, Yigal and David Shulman (ed. and trans.), *"Self-Surrender", "Peace", "Compassion" and "The Mission of the Goose": Poems and Prayers from South India*, trans., Clay Sanskrit Library, New York: New York University Press & JJC Foundation, 2009).

selfhood and individualism.<sup>7</sup> It is likely for this reason that Sanskrit literary production lacks testimonies describing authors' lives. Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's works contain some autobiographical data. Ample information about the illustrious family he was born into can be found especially in the *Nalacaritra* and *Gaṅgāvataraṇa*. In the preface to the *Nīlakaṇṭhavijayacampū*, the poet states the date in which it was composed to be the Kali Era 4738, corresponding to 1637/1638<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, it is beyond the scope of the present article to analyse autobiographical parts of Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's works in detail. Although pieces of information provided by the poet are interesting, they remain in the background of *The Manifestation of Tranquillity* that belongs to the domain of reflective poetry. This is the form in which Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita decided to leave behind the unique, poetical vision of his life's journey. Elements of reflective poetry and the metaphor of one's life's journey individually are not uncommon in Sanskrit literature. However, as I will try to show, the author joined these two into a single work, which was innovative at the time the poem was written and is unusual in Sanskrit poetry in general.

As suggested by N.P. Unni, the *Śāntivilāsa* shows 'the mature thoughts of a person trying to escape from the servitude of royalty to seek liberation of body and soul'.<sup>9</sup> The composition is a reflection of author's state of mind, put forth in a poetic manner and containing some explicit and implicit generalizations about life. One cannot find descriptions in the *Śāntivilāsa* of particular events, names or places. Much more important are emotions, auto-reflection and contemplation of life. *The Manifestation of Tranquillity* forces readers to think in both an intimate and a didactic way. For this purpose, the author chose the finely emphasized metaphor of life's journey, which occurs twice directly in the text. In the ninth stanza, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita wrote:

*chāyā toyam vasanam aśanam vāhanam dīpikā vā  
kretum yasmin kila na sulabham kim cid apy eṣu martyaiḥ |*

<sup>7</sup> More about the various aspects of life histories, biographies and autobiographies in Indian literatures in David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (ed.), *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Unni, *Nilakantha Dikṣita*, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Unni, *Nilakantha Dikṣita*, p. 19.

*tasmin dūre pathi tanubhṛtām sarvathaivābhigamye*  
*prasthānārham kam api tu vidhiṁ ghasmarā na smarāmaḥ || ŚV 9.*

Shelter, water, garment, food, vehicle or light – among these, where probably nothing whatsoever is easy to acquire by mortals, there, on this long road of human beings which has to be travelled by all means, what indeed is the formula of the proper departure<sup>10</sup> of which we, voracious, do not remember?

The passage describes the existence as a long journey filled with desires for worldly objects which are of no use on the way. The road is long, such that gaining wealth in this world will not ensure ‘the departure’, or liberation, from the circle of rebirth that cannot be bought. Nevertheless, human beings focus on the acquisition of goods that obfuscate the real goal of the journey. In a poetic manner, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita talks about the path onto which all creatures step and continue their journey through existence. The speaker draws attention to the real aim of the peregrination – finding ‘the formula of the proper departure’. The treasure of ‘the formula’ that should accompany one on their life path is neglected. In the light of the body’s needs, one’s disregard for worldly objects and peacefulness of mind become unimportant. No mortal has a choice: they have to set out on a long road, but being voracious, they forget that in this journey, gathering material goods and indulging in worldly pleasures are not the real prize. The goal of life should be to be worthy of it, that is to honour the debt of being born, not to accumulate goods.

The metaphor of the journey comes to the fore once again in the seventieth stanza of the Śāntivilāsa:

*gantavyo ‘dhvā sakaladuravasthānasamṛpātabhūmir*  
*gatvā dṛśyas tribhuvanajanāyuskaḥkalāntaḥ kṛtāntaḥ | ŚV 17ab*

The distance that has to be travelled is the land, where one meets all kinds of odds. Having travelled it, one sees the god of death<sup>11</sup> – the end of life for the world’s creatures.

<sup>10</sup> *Prasthānārham*, translated here as ‘the proper departure’ can refer to dying, departing this life, the final departure, liberation of the soul, as well as the limitation of needs.

<sup>11</sup> *Kṛtānta*, translated here as ‘the god of death’, literally means ‘leading to a decisive termination’, ‘the end of what has been done’ and is one of the names of Yama, god ruling the spirits of the dead.

In this stanza, *adhvan* – ‘the distance’, ‘journey’ or ‘road’– refers to earthly existence, that is human’s presence in this world. At the end of the road, one inevitably meets death personified.

Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita applied a certain pattern in his work. The whole text has a definite order leading the reader through consecutive stages of the journey: from birth, through education, family life, and gaining wealth and position in society to old age and death. This flow is not marked by certain events described in the work, but rather a reflection upon successive stadia in relation to life as a whole. While the beginning and end are clearly marked, the intermediate stages intertwine – the author masterfully juggles the elements that constitute one’s life span. Following this path, the Śāntivilāsa gradually reveals its stages. The work is built upon the constant alternation of auto-reflective stanzas containing personal details, intimate testimony of the author and didactic passages generalizing about life.<sup>12</sup>

This didactic aspect runs through the entirety of Sanskrit poetry. Reflective poems, on the other hand, are not so common, especially when they exploit the domain of authors’ personal experiences by offering examples from their lives. In Sanskrit literature, reflective elements are found more often in didactic, gnomic stanzas, short antithesis or epigrams, than the other way round. Nevertheless, reflective and didactic poetry are closely connected. Thought in poetry can be realized using the two types of meaning: the inner meaning, ‘expressing mood, attitude and vision by the aid of imagery and rhythm’; and the outer meaning, which dominates didactic works.<sup>13</sup> Reflective poetry does not depend only on inner meaning. The best reflective poems fuse the inner and outer meanings together. Didactic poetry can rise to the level of reflective poetry through ironic, humorous and satirical self-exposure and through the use of symbolism.<sup>14</sup> Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita’s Śāntivilāsa is neither humorous nor satirical,

<sup>12</sup> Compare with the scheme at the end of the article.

<sup>13</sup> Vinayak Krishna Gokak, *An Integral View Of Poetry: An India Perspective*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1975, p. 109.

<sup>14</sup> Gokak, *An Integral View Of Poetry: An India Perspective*, pp. 108-109. V.K. Gokak refers in this matter to the ‘Understanding Poetry’ by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in which the authors included the analyses of T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ and Matthew Arnold’s ‘The Scholar Gipsy’ (Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Poetry. An Anthology for College Students*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1939, pp. 538-548, 585-595). Gokak mentions the

but it definitely blends reflective and didactic elements, in many cases in the form of ironic self-exposure. The author leads readers through the path of his life in a deliberate order: didactic passages in which he often addresses the reader are directly preceded by stanzas referring to his private experiences and personal life.

The work begins with the introspective, auto-reflective verses in which Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita recalls his past and first steps in life's journey. In the very first words, he asks: '*vaṁśe kasminn ajaniṣi? kayoḥ putratām agrahīṣam?*' (ŚV 1a), 'What a family I was born into? Whose son I became?' The author refers to his parents and ancestors, to mention his grandfather's name, notable scholar Accā Dīkṣita, and the famous poet and theoretician Appayya Dīkṣita. These first verses show that Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita was proud of his origins, but also aware of its burden. Nevertheless, in the following stanzas, he writes about his wife and children, corrupted society, fruitless attempts to tame the senses, illusions of love and wealth, death and questioning his own faith; this shift brings about a change of mood. This gradual transition illustrates Brooks and Warren's statement that 'the development of tone in a poem always conforms, in so far as work is successful, to a psychological structure'.<sup>15</sup> Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita is a guide in the pessimistic journey of life, designated by the realization of the consecutive aims of human existence, or *puruṣārthas*.<sup>16</sup> This scheme predominates until the point at which it becomes clear that the previous steps in the journey correspond to the objects of human pursuit and stages of life described in normative texts. In the 39<sup>th</sup> stanza of his work, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita reveals his attitude toward *puruṣārthas*:

*abhyasyādaḥ śrutim atha gṛhaṁ prāpya labdhvā mahārthān  
iṣṭvā yajñair janītanayaḥ pravrajed āyuso 'nte |  
ity ācaṣṭe ya iha sa manur yājñavalkyo 'pi vā me  
tāvat kālāṁ pratibhavati ced āyusas tatpramāṇam || ŚV 39.*

poems as the examples of the use of two devices (ironic, satirical self-exposure and symbolism) allowing the transition from didactic to reflective poetry.

<sup>15</sup> Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Poetry. An Anthology for College Students*, p. 345.

<sup>16</sup> *Puruṣārthas*, four proper goals of human existence, include *dharma* ('moral conduct', 'righteousness'), *artha* ('utility', 'means of life'), *kāma* ('enjoyment', 'love') and *mokṣa* ('liberation', 'spiritual freedom'). More about the concept of objects of human pursuit for example in: John M. Collier, 'Puruṣārthas as Human Aims', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 1968, pp. 315-319.

First, study the *Veda*. Then, build a house. Having obtained great wealth, perform the rituals. By the sacrifices, beget children. Then, at the end of life, renounce all worldly attachments. Here, in this world, someone said it: this *Manu* or perhaps *Yājñavalkya*.<sup>17</sup> For me, it's all right if it corresponds to the time of life and its length.<sup>18</sup>

The above stanza occurs in a meaningful position in the text. The third round of longer, reflective and didactic passages finishes, and the part devoted to god and faith is about to start. These final stanzas in the poem create a much more dynamic series of verses, which correspond to the final steps in the journey of life and are filled with doubts concerning the existence of god and reflection upon death.

<sup>17</sup> The stanza or its part are not direct quotations from Manu's treatise or Yājñavalkya's work but rather the short summary of general statement concerning the stages and purposes of life expressed by both authors. In the Manusmṛiti the information concerning the duties assigned to consecutive *āśramas*, stages of life, occur in many passages of the text. The statement to which Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita might have referred can be the one expressed in the sixth chapter: 'A man should pay the three debts before he sets his mind on renunciation. (...) A man should set his mind on renunciation only after he has studied Vedas in accordance with the rules, fathered sons in keeping with the Law, and offered sacrifices according to his ability' (transl. Patrick Olivelle: Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System. The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2004, p. 139.), as well as a very similar one, included in the third chapter of the Yājñavalkyasmṛiti: 'No one but the man who has studied the Vedas, muttered prayers (japa), fathered sons, given food, maintained the sacred fires, and offered sacrifices according to his ability, may set his mind on renunciation' (transl. Patrick Olivelle: Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System. The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*, p. 143.).

<sup>18</sup> Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita often refers to the authority of the normative texts. In some of the cases the author only recalls the rules given by the sages. The other times, like in the example mentioned above, the remark of this kind reveals his partially sceptical, partially ironical attitude towards the law-books. Occasionally Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita emphasizes the lack of particular rules and incompleteness of given laws, like for example in the stanza 4.23 of the Gaṅgāvataraṇa, where he criticizes the evasion of bath by the Brahmins during the cold season:

*patitavyaṁ himair nāma snātavyaṁ nāma ca dvijaiḥ |*  
*kiṁ kurmaḥ kṛtavān evaṁ sa vidhir nopalabhyate ||*

Indeed, the snow should fall, and certainly, the Brahmins should bath.

What are we doing? The rule compiled like this has not been traced [in the texts].

I would like to thank David Pierdominici Leão (Sapienza University of Rome) for drawing my attention to the above stanza.

The other aspect that seems to influence the character of the poem and impact the reader is the correlation between the structure of the work, its content and the meter the author used. As noted by Brooks and Warren, 'the basis for the effect can only be given accurately by a study of the relations existing among all the factors, of which meter is only one'.<sup>19</sup> The authors warn against considering meter the most important literary device and believing 'that a specific, emotional effect can be tied absolutely to a particular metrical instance'.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the metrical pattern in the Śāntivilāsa is not the only factor creating the tone and evoking a specific emotional effect. Nevertheless, in the case of Sanskrit poetry, the meter influences the final emotional effect to the large extent. Even if this correlation is not absolute, as Brooks and Warren claim it can never be, meter plays an important role. The Śāntivilāsa does not abound in poetical embellishments. Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita exploited some basic figures of speech, but overall, the language is clear, simple and plain. The main focus is on the content and meaning of the poem. Here, in the Śāntivilāsa, the meaning is not only the clay for modelling poetical embellishments. In Sanskrit *kāvya* poetry, which is typically ornate, highly formalized and dominated by various embellishments of sense and sound, this kind of approach was uncommon. Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita limited his repertoire of poetical embellishments. Nevertheless, his choice of meter seems to be deliberate. The way in which it supplements the general mood of the work and emphasizes the metaphor of the journey deserves more attention. The meter used by Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita is *mandākrāntā*. It belongs to a *varṇavṛtta* class of meters, regulated by the number of syllables in the half-line.<sup>21</sup> The name of this particular meter is the compound of the words *mandā* ('slow', 'delicate', 'moving softly') and *krāntā* ('past', 'gone', 'elapsed'). Therefore, it can be translated as 'slowly advancing' or 'slow-moving'. Many names of Sanskrit meters are vivid, poetic terms, though their original meaning has been forgotten. However, in the case of *mandākrāntā*, one can easily find the analogy between the name and the construction of the meter. The poetical

<sup>19</sup> Brooks and Warenn, *Understanding Poetry. An Anthology for College Students*, p. viii.

<sup>20</sup> Brooks and Warenn, *Understanding Poetry. An Anthology for College Students*, p. viii.

<sup>21</sup> More about the divisions of meters in Sanskrit in K.K. Geethakumary, *Metre in Sanskrit. A Study with Special Reference to Vṛttavārtika of Rāmapāṇivāda*, Calicut: Calicut University Press, 2008 and A.S. Deo, 'The metrical organization of Classical Sanskrit verse', *Journal of Linguistics* 43 (01), 2007, pp. 63-114.



definition of *mandākrāntā* given by Kṣemendra in the *Suvṛttatilaka* depicts all of its important features:

*mantharākrāntaviśrabdhaiś caturbhiḥ prathamākṣaraiḥ |*  
*madhyaṣaṭke' ticature mandākrāntā virājate ||* ST 1.34

*Mandākrāntā* with its slowly advancing and calm first four syllables shines forth in the very swift, middle six [syllables].

In this vivid and slightly technical description, the most striking notion is the idea of movement – at first calm and slow, then rapid and energetic. Looking at the metrical pattern of *mandākrāntā*, it becomes clear that at the very end, it resembles an alternation of these two modes:

- - - - | v v v v v - | - v - - v - -

The meter itself is therefore a suitable tool to emphasize the journey with its ups and downs. It is a perfect supplement to the emotions that are expressed in the verses composed in this meter. The *Suvṛttatilaka* informs the reader that ‘*prāvṛṭṭpravāsavvyasane mandākrāntā virājate*’; (ST 3.21cd), ‘*mandākrāntā* shines in the [descriptions of] miseries of the [lover’s] absence at home during the rainy season’. Kṣemendra noticed that the variable, metrical dynamics perfectly reflect the mood accompanying the separation. For this reason, the charm of *mandākrāntā* can fully blossom in the description of these scenes. These qualities are likely responsible for attributing the meter with *sandేశakāvya*, messenger poems.

The example of the *Śāntivilāsa* shows that *mandākrāntā* can also be suitable for a reflective poem. In Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita’s poem, the meter’s relation to movement – from the point of view of both time and space – emphasizes the metaphor of life’s journey and merges with the composition. A comparison of the metrical pattern with the scheme presenting the arrangement of auto-reflective and didactic stanzas shows that they are related. There is a parallel between them: auto-reflective, intimate stanzas correspond to the slow, heavy syllables constructing the meter, while shorter, didactic passages suit the swift *laghus*. The end of the poem, dominated by the verses focused on god and faith, consists of both auto-reflective and didactic parts that occur

alternately, exactly as in the case of the *mandākrāntā*'s pattern, where *guru* and *laghu* syllables intertwine.

The final stanzas and their variable dynamics are closely related to the prevailing topic: at the end of the poem, the author focuses on the end of life's journey and the question of faith comes to the fore. Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's attitude toward god is expressed in the semantic layer of the text, as well as in its composition; it is a complicated relationship. The author is well-known for his admiration for Śiva. He composed various poems in praise of the god.<sup>22</sup> In the course of the *Śāntivilāsa*, Śiva's name appears continuously, but it is the last part of the work which is the most meaningful from a religious point of view. The speaker seeks final detachment from worldly objects, that is for *śānti*, the peace and tranquillity occurring in the title of the work. He seems to pin his hopes on god, god's mercy and god's guidance. Nevertheless, in the 47<sup>th</sup> stanza, he admits that his faith is not so firm:

*diṣṭyā labdham dvijavarakule janma tatrāpi diṣṭyā  
dharmādharmasthitir avagataiva prasādād gurūṇām |  
janmany asminn api yadī na me sambhaved āstikatvaṁ  
nistāraḥ kiṁ nirayabhavanāt sarvamokṣe 'pi labhyaḥ || ŚV 47.*

Luckily, I was born into the best Brahmin family. Then again, luckily, the [knowledge of the] permanence of good and evil has been acquired [by me] thanks to the favour of teachers.

If in such a life, I am not capable of believing in the existence of god, how will I be allowed to escape from the place devoid of happiness into complete liberation?

In the case of faith, the speaker flounders between opposing viewpoints. He is torn by his emotions. Spiritual freedom and liberation depend not only on the harmonious and righteous 'journey' through the consecutive stages of life and the realisation of *puruṣārthas*; the speaker is also aware of the supreme condition, genuine faith. Nevertheless, he questions his own ability to place unconditional trust in the existence of god. All of these doubts and emotions are emphasized by the

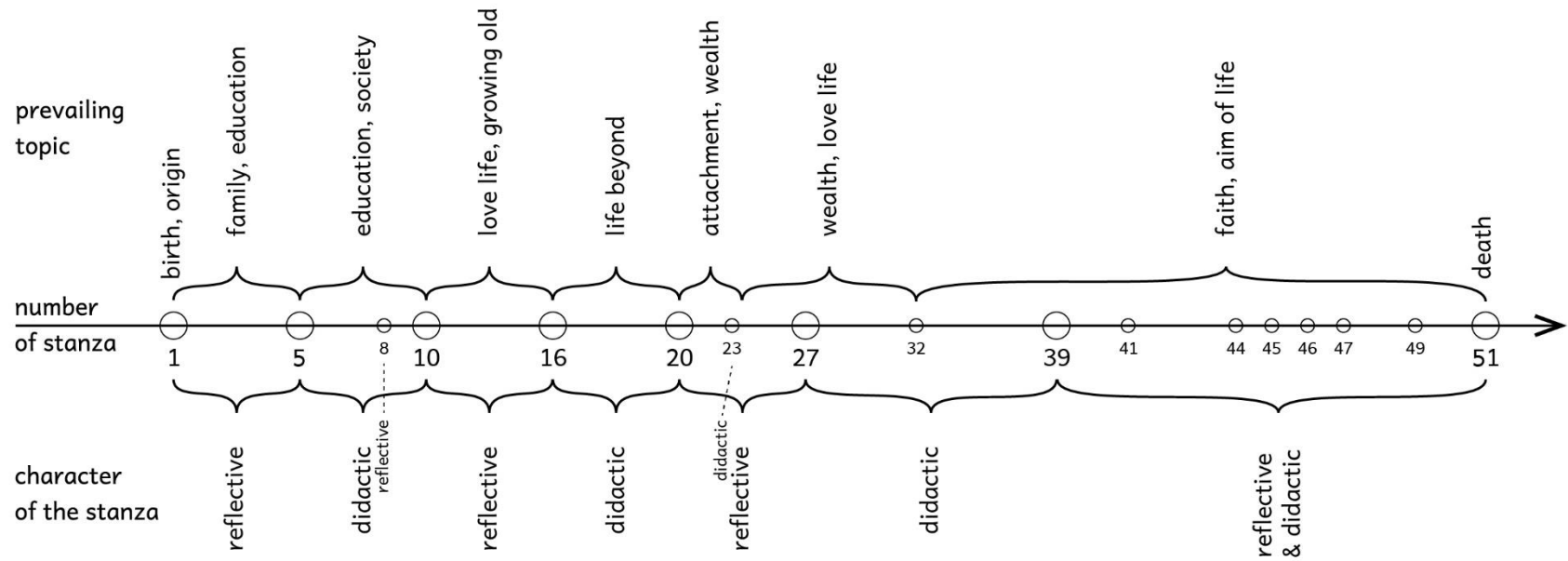
<sup>22</sup> To mention only the Śivalīlārṇava, the *māhākāvya* in twenty-two cantos describing the sixty-four exploits of Śiva, the Śivotkarṣamañjarī, the fifty-two verses long poem in praise of Śiva or the Śivatattvarahasya which comments on the one hundred and eight names of Śiva enumerated in a section of the Skāndapurāṇa called the Śaṅkarasamhitā.

*mandākrāntā* meter, which evokes separation and longing, changing the rhythm in parallel to the constant movement of the tides. Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita, the sceptical devotee, expresses his need for '*maṣṛṇitam māmakānandam*' (ŚV 49.), 'gentle, selfish joy'.

Śāntivilāsa presents life as a journey to death filled with constant struggle – struggles with one's senses, limitations and odds. The ultimate destination is not uniting one's self with the Absolute, but rather is detachment or peace. Śiva, partly exalted, partly doubted, still remains a passive onlooker – one must search for the answers in him- or herself. On the other hand, the speaker seems to believe that faith is a prerequisite for final liberation understood as *śānti*, 'the tranquillity', which deepens the dilemma and brings into question the possibility of its achievement.

The compositional consistency of the poem and careful choice of the meter corresponding to the metaphor of life as a journey come together to make this work modern in its time. This work is infiltrated by quiet, philosophical resignation, which at the very end, gives space for the emotional testimony of an old man. Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita's poem serves as evidence of Brooks and Warren's statement that 'the effect of the poem depends (...) on the relating of the logical structure in it to the psychological and emotional effect desired by the poet'.<sup>23</sup> Sanskrit literature did not advocate natural expression, which was chained to a heavy boulder of exhibitionism. Despite a lack of many available models, Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita managed to break this trend and created a work that contributed to the development of reflective poetry, a scarcely represented field in Sanskrit poetry. In this way, his poetical and life's journey led him to a destination that few, if any, Sanskrit poets have reached.

<sup>23</sup> Brooks and Warenn, *Understanding Poetry. An Anthology for College Students*, p. 523.



Scheme no 1. The arrangement of consecutive stanzas in the Śāntivilāsa

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